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USSR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

T. SORENSEN GIVES VIEWS ON U.S. IN VIETNAM

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[Theodore Sorenson interview given to Oleg Prutkov, LITERARY GAZETTE special correspondent: "Populous America: Meetings and impressions"]

[Excerpts] I would like to describe one meeting which, properly speaking, began in Moscow when Theodore Sorensen, a friend and collaborator of John Kennedy, visited the LITERARY GAZETTE, and which was continued in New York, in his office on the 24th floor of 575 Madison Avenue.

Altogether we conversed for several hours in Moscow and in New York. Naturally, many things will remain outside this newspaper article. I shall try to transmit what appears to me to be the main, fundamental things. The discussion primarily, concerned the Vietnam problem:

Question: The escalation of the war is accompanied by an escalation of the criticism of official government policy. Public opinion polls have shown that more than one-half of Americans condemn Johnson's policy. James Reston wrote in the INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE: "People are now searching for new concepts, and if they do not find them they will later search for new leaders."

Answer: It is fully obvious that the discontent with the course of the war in Vietnam entails discontent with the activities of President Johnson's administration. One circumstance, however, escapes your attention when you study public opinion polls or articles such as those by James Reston. What matters is that the discontent with the government policy is being expressed by people who cherish opposite views. One group constitutes those who are opposed to the escalation; they demand that the airraids be stopped and the earliest possible withdrawal from the war, and they criticize Johnson for continuing the bombings and for increasing the troop contingents sent to Vietnam.

Another group, on the other hand, believes that the President is not militant enough. In their opinion, the United States possesses a power which would enable it to wipe Vietnam off the surface of the earth. These people advocate an intensification of the bombings and the blockade or mining of the Port of Haiphong.

I believe that President Johnson, no matter how severely he may be criticized in your country, deserves a certain approval because he has shown restraint and has not yielded to the influence and pressure of those people who would like to unleash an even bigger war.

"Restraint?" About what manifestation of "restraint" can one speak when Hanoi is being subjected to most cruel and barbaric bombings? A "certain approval?" But the President is being criticized literally in all countries of the world and the protests are growing. How is it possible to explain such assessments of Sorensen which do not agree with the actual state of affairs and with his own reasonable approach? Earlier, during our conversation in Moscow, Sorensen noted: "When I am in the United States I do not belong to the partisans of the war in Vietnam. At the same time, however, it seems to me that when I am abroad it is inappropriate for me to act as a critic of the foreign policy of my country."

Naturally I understand that a Soviet journalist is not an altogether suitable conversational partner to discuss intraparty differences.

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And it is absolutely obvious to me that pre-election considerations and the desire not to deepen the contradictions within the Democratic Party play the main role in this respect. The Washington POST recently devoted an article to the opinions of former Kennedy advisers. This article referred to differences between them and the White House. But they believe that an open clash with the present President would only lead to a split in the party and would open the road for a Republican candidate in the forthcoming elections.

It must be pointed out that there does not prevail a complete identity of views within this group either. Some colleagues of Sorenson from the "Kennedy team" have made more definite statements. Thus, for example, Arthur Schlesinger, the former assistant of the late president, sharply criticized Johnson in a speech and predicted the end of Johnson's political career. I told Sorenson that in the almost unanimous opinion of commentators, many of the aggressive demands of the military circles are being satisfied. Sorenson agreed with this and noted that they have achieved certain success in Washington. ...The conversation touched on his article which had just appeared in the press.

Question: You advocated the cessation of bombings in the SATURDAY REVIEW magazine?

Answer: We must now openly admit that a continuation of the bombings will not help us to stop the war...stubbornness in pursuing the present course will cost us more than stopping the bombings. It must also be admitted that sooner or later we will have to stop the bombings, and the longer we postpone this the more difficult it is for both sides to conclude a reasonable agreement.

And the road toward this agreement? Sorenson writes about returning to the Geneva agreement; about discontinuing military actions and the withdrawal of all foreign troops and the elimination of foreign bases; about the creation of a neutral, peaceful, and independent Vietnam which, through new elections, could select the political, economic, and social system it desires and solve the problems of its mutual relations or reunification with the North by means of a free manifestation of its will; about the forming of a government--in case of necessity a coalition government which includes all parties--in a manner similar to that used in Laos in 1962.

Thus, Sorenson is for stopping the bombings and for a realistic view of the Vietnam problem. It is not difficult to note that this is contrary to the official policy of Washington and to the course pursued by Johnson. As Theodore Sorenson aptly noted in characterizing U.S. policy in South Vietnam in the same article: "When it became clear that two doses of penicillin were not enough to help the patient, we gave him four, then six, and now eight doses. It is high time to understand that penicillin is by no means what our patient needs and that if we continue to increase the doses we will simply cause him to leave this world."

Now a few questions on the coming elections:

Question: How will the urgent problems of today of which we have just spoken influence the coming elections?

Answer: In American history not a single president who was in power has ever suffered defeat in the national convention of his party over the presentation of his nomination for another term.

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Question: And if Johnson wants to withdraw from nomination?

Answer: I do not consider this likely.

Question: Considering the successes of the Republicans in the midterm elections of 1966, could a Republican candidate defeat the Democrats?

Answer: I think that the most difficult man for the Democrats to defeat would be Rockefeller, even though within the Republican Party itself, Rockefeller's chances of being nominated are smaller than those of any other candidate.

Question: How do you assess the prospects of the group of Democrats who have created a committee for putting forward the candidacies of R. Kennedy and W. Fulbright for this year's forthcoming presidential elections? And also the appeal by 50 Democrats to Johnson to abandon his attempt at a second term?

Answer: So far this committee has no influence on the development of events, and I do not think that there will be any changes.

(I note parenthetically: Recently another committee has been organized in New York "for an alternative policy for Democrats." The discontent is growing. The November polls showed that 52 percent of Americans would like to see Kennedy as a presidential candidate, while only 32 percent spoke for Lyndon Johnson.)

Question: What is the status of Senator Robert Kennedy?

Answer: I wish to stress that Robert Kennedy will not oppose Johnson in the presidential elections. However, if for some unforeseen reason, President Johnson should want to withdraw from the battle, it could happen that Robert Kennedy could be put forward as the presidential nominee by the Democratic Party.

Sorensen stressed that Johnson will hardly suffer a defeat during the national convention of his party. At the same time, one detects a certain identity of his concept with the viewpoint of Senator Eugene McCarthy, who recently threw his challenge to Johnson and announced his intention of seeking the Democratic Party nomination as candidate for president. According to observers, McCarthy will hardly achieve serious success. But this step by McCarthy supported by Robert Kennedy caused considerable alarm in the camp of the current president; One cannot exclude the possibility that McCarthy's actions constitute a "trial balloon" launched by supporters of Robert Kennedy.

KOSYGIN INDIA VISIT AIDS FRIENDLY RELATIONS

Moscow Domestic Service in Russian 1030 GMT 24 Jan 58 L

[Yuriy Soltan commentary]

[Excerpts] The Soviet Union is invariably supporting the aspirations of all peoples to strengthen their national independence, economic development and social progress. This is one of the basic principles of Soviet foreign policy. In the Soviet Union the peoples of the young liberated countries see a bulwark of their independence. In it they find a friend who understands them, a reliable partner who cooperates with them. In this respect the history and development of Soviet-Indian relations are illustrative.